

Fact Sheet

Influenza

Recommendations for Businesses

What is influenza?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza is a highly contagious virus that affects mainly the nose, throat, chest, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Common Symptoms of Influenza

- Fever (typically $\geq 100^{\circ}$ F)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

Infectious Period

People may be able to infect each other one day before symptoms occur and up to 10 days after being sick.

The Spread of Influenza

Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Why you should get the flu vaccine every year

The influenza virus changes every year as it makes its way around the world. Since the exact flu viruses are almost never the same from year to year, the strains of influenza in the vaccine change each year. This is why you need to get a new flu vaccine every year. The vaccine only protects you from influenza for one year.

Vaccination

Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available, usually early in the fall. This will provide protection for the entire flu season.

Who should get vaccinated?

Yearly flu vaccination is recommended for almost everyone over 6 months of age, and is especially important for those people at high risk for developing flu-related complications, such as children younger than five; adults 65 years of age and older; pregnant women; and people with certain medical conditions like heart and lung problems, and diabetes.

The Nasal Spray Vaccine

Vaccination with the nasal spray flu vaccine (FluMist®) is an option for healthy people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant and healthy persons who live with or care for those in a high risk group. The one exception is healthy persons who care for persons with severely weakened immune systems who require a protected environment; these healthy persons should get the inactivated vaccine.

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What things can I do to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in my office?

- **Annual influenza vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza.**
- **Stay home when sick.** Employees with symptoms of influenza should not come to work. Excluding ill employees from the work place can help reduce the spread of the illness to other employees. If possible, allowing employees to work from home when ill can help reduce the spread of disease.
- **Wash hands often.** People often catch influenza and other viruses by picking up the virus on their hands, and then touching their nose, eyes, or mouth. Wash hands several times a day, using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC song). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are available for employee use.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Influenza is often spread by coughs and sneezes. Make sure disposable tissues are available in work areas for runny noses and sneezing. Individuals should always cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed.
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer at employee desks. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (e.g. contact with a keyboard).
- **Contact your health care provider.** Employees should contact their physician when they become ill during influenza season. Anti-viral drugs may reduce the severity and length of illness when they are taken early in the illness. Antivirals need to be started within 48 hours of becoming ill to be effective.
- **Avoid close contact.** Employees should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, etc.
- **Clean surfaces often.** Common use surfaces, such as water fountains, door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, and phones should be cleaned frequently with disinfectants. Commercial disinfectants or bleach solutions are appropriate. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes bleach solution. This should be mixed fresh daily).

If you get sick

- Stay home
- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- There are over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever)
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people including people 65 and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions and young children
- Consult your health care provider early for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention

Emergency Warning Signs of Influenza in adults

- Difficult breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting